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SUBJECT: MUSLIM AMBASSADORS PRAISE PRESIDENT'S CAIRO SPEECH
AT USUN OUTREACH EVENT

Classified By: Classified By Ambassador Susan E. Rice, reason 1.4 (b) a
nd (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Ambassador Rice on June 4 hosted 28 Ambassadors from Muslim-majority countries at her residence to view President Obama's speech in Cairo a few hours earlier and discuss it. There was uniform praise for the President's sincerity and honesty, and most judged the speech a watershed event. Some noted that he was raising expectations. Most Ambassadors warmly received the President's words on the Israeli-Palestinian issue as a sign that the Administration was moving in a positive direction. On outreach to Iran, a handful of Ambassadors offered tepid praise. A number of Ambassadors spoke about the need to operationalize the speech and some accepted the challenge to do so at the UN. End summary.

Effusive Praise for President's Speech

¶2. (C) Ambassador Rice on June 4 hosted 28 Ambassadors from Muslim-majority countries at her residence to view and discuss President Obama's speech, given a few hours earlier in Cairo. Every Ambassador praised the speech, and most judged it a watershed event. Ambassador Rice opened the gathering with a personal reflection about the genesis of the speech, pointing back to the President's August 1, 2007 speech when, as a candidate, he promised to deliver a speech from a Muslim capital if elected. The Ambassadors were invited to react to the President's speech, and though differing in tone, every Ambassador praised the President for his sincerity and honesty. No Ambassador took issue with the speech, but they largely avoided commenting on the President's challenge on substantive issues such as Israel's legitimate concerns, or the implicit criticism of the deficit of democracy, human rights, good governance, gender equality and sound development policies in many of their countries.

¶3. (C) Libyan Perm Rep Shalgham said that he is a graduate of Cairo University and could never have imagined three years ago "when Libya was still considered a rogue state" that he would have been invited to such an event. He described the President's speech as "sincere, specific, and balanced." He also said that he admired the President's choice of quotations from the Koran. Egyptian Perm Rep Abdulaziz drew attention to the President's quote from Thomas Jefferson, "I hope that our wisdom will grow with our power, and teach us that the less we use our power the greater it will be." Abdulaziz said this reflected the Administration's "change of course," and noted that the less the United States uses its power, the greater it will be. He stressed that relations should be built on dialogue, not on power. Jordanian Perm Rep Al-Allaf said, "This is perhaps the most important speech a U.S. president could give," and emphasized that President Obama had raised expectations and set the bar high, an opinion echoed by Qatari Perm Rep al-Nasser. Lebanese Perm

Rep Salam called the speech an "unprecedented and historic speech in form and content" and said he hoped it would be a new step toward partnership.

¶4. (C) Indonesian Charge d'Affaires Kleib praised the message and said it was time for the Muslim world to open its arms to the United States and to engage in mutual respect and understanding. He welcomed Saudi Arabia's interfaith dialogue initiative and noted the similarities between it and the themes in the President's speech. Bangladeshi Perm Rep Jahan said she personally found the speech to be "mesmerizing" and felt "overwhelmed personally by its powerful words." She said it was important for the President to remind the Muslim world of U.S. values. Moroccan Perm Rep Loulichki said the speech was "sincere" and that they could not have expected more from the President. Syrian Perm Rep Ja'afari said, "We have been waiting for such a President for decades; now we have him." Following the event, Ja'afari in confidence told Ambassador Rice, "Keep him (the President) safe. This is the first time I can honestly say, 'God bless America.'" Saudi Ambassador Al Nafisee said that even one of the most critical commentators from the Arab newspaper Al Sharq Al Awsat had described the speech as "one of the greatest speeches ever from a Western leader." Arab League Permanent Observer Mahmassani said he had never expected in his lifetime to hear such a speech from a U.S. President. He contrasted the President's speech of cooperation and respect with an oblique reference to President Bush's comment "you are with us or against us." He also contrasted the President's call for a stop to Israeli settlement activity with the previous administration's observation that "settlements are not helpful."

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Words on Israeli-Palestinian Front Warmly Received

¶5. (C) The Egyptian Perm Rep referred to the President's statement that the Arab Peace Initiative is an important beginning and stressed that it needs to be recognized as such. He also stressed that peace in the Middle East must be comprehensive. Palestinian Observer Ambassador Mansour remarked that the speech had a number of important elements, including the symbolic one noting the suffering of the Palestinian people. He said it is "no longer business as usual" and cited his participation in President Abbas, recent visit to Washington. He noted that Abbas met not just with the President and Secretary of State but also with the National Security Advisor and officials in the Department of Defense. He cited the changed atmosphere in Washington and said his mission is reflecting that change and adjusting its approach at the UN. Malaysian Perm Rep Ali and Indonesian Charge d'Affaires Kleib said that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the only issue standing in the way of relations with Israel. Moreover, Kleib said no other international conflict is more important to Indonesians, and he noted that Indonesian domestic public opinion of the United States rises and falls with U.S. engagement in or withdrawal from that conflict. During the Annapolis Conference, he said there was a positive opinion of the United States, but this fell during last January's conflict in Gaza. The Syrian Perm Rep was pleased with the President's remarks on the issue, but he stressed that the approach should be comprehensive since the conflict in the Middle East was broader than that of the Israelis and Palestinians.

Welcomed but Reserved Outreach to Iran

¶6. (C) Although only the Ambassadors from UAE, Libya and Lebanon referenced the President's remarks on Iran they welcomed the outreach, albeit cautiously. UAE Perm Rep al-Jarman encouraged a convergence between the U.S. and Iran, saying such a move should be in the interests of the region. He said Iran's nuclear program should be peaceful. Libyan Perm Rep Shalgam appealed to his colleagues to "help the President find compromise on Iran...perhaps through the

Organization of the Islamic Conference, the League of Arab States or the European Union." Lebanese Perm Rep Salam welcomed U.S. outreach to Iran in general terms.

Moving Forward

¶7. (C) Most Ambassadors were grateful for the President's forward-looking message though some politely cautioned that the speech represented only a beginning of a process. Some were eager to put the President's initiatives in motion. Afghani Perm Rep Tanin said the President's speech was a good start requiring more concrete action to forge long-term partnerships. He urged everyone to help the President to achieve the right mix of soft and hard power, and the Lebanese Perm Rep also advised operationalizing the President's seven elements and told Ambassador Rice, "it is part of our job to work with you." Algerian Perm Rep Benmehidi called it a "great speech" and also noted the need to operationalize its elements. He referred to the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations at the UN and said the group has an agenda that deals with all the elements in the speech and would look forward to working with the U.S.

Other Outreach

¶8. (U) In addition to this event, Ambassador Rice also took to the airwaves with interviews given to Al Jazeera Arabic and BBC World to amplify the President's message. Transcripts and links to the video of these will be provided septel via unclassified email to the NSC and Department.
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